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SUBJECT: ARMENIA PROSECUTES A CASE OF HATE SPEECH

REF: "Report on Global Anti-Semitism," January 5

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) On January 24 authorities arrested the leader of the Armenian Aryan Union, Armen Avetisian, for "inciting national hatred," and after a two-day trial he received a suspended sentence on March 18. Avetisian told a newspaper in January that "the future of any nation that has a Jewish community is in danger, and those (the Jews) who endanger the Armenian state should be driven out." Avetisian made previous public statements that Armenia should be "purged" of Jews and Yezdis (ref). Avetisian had served a total of 35 days in pre-trial detention as the judge in his case considered his statements so actionable as to preclude his release.

2. (SBU) The Armenian Aryan Union has approximately 50 members, and it made headlines several times in the last six months with statements against Jews and homosexuals. In previous discussions, neither the Chief Rabbi of Armenia nor a prominent secular Jewish leader knew of any incidents of violence or vandalism committed by the group, although they both complained to us that the group distributes hate literature.

3. (SBU) Armenia's Human Rights Ombudsman, Larissa Alaverdian told us that she thought the trial was unfortunate. She also elaborated on her belief that Armenia should move away from the Soviet practice of proscribing certain types of speech, and that without an act of intolerance, the case should not have gone to trial.
EVANS